

Wanted— A Husband

A Buried Marriage That Was Not Repeated

By F. A. MITCHEL
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The landlord of the Antlers in the village of B., having finished his breakfast, sat him down before an open log fire to read the morning paper. His was a hotel for summer boarders, and since it was now the dead of winter his guests were few and far between. He read the little sheet before him, including the advertisements, then arose from his seat, went to the window, looked out on the dreary scene and longed for summer to come, when he would again be in the midst of the season's bustle.

He was on the eve of a bustle of another kind. Down the road came a sleigh, the driver thrashing the galloping horses that drew it. Instead of passing the Antlers, he reined in at the front door, and a lady stepped out and ran up the steps. The landlord went into the hall and admitted her.

"I want a husband," she said. "In steady."

The landlord gaped at her wonderingly.

"A husband, I say, immediately. I'll make it worth your while and the man who marries me."

At the words "I'll make it worth your while" a change came over the landlord.

"What kind of a husband?"

"Any kind. Be quick about it or I am lost."

The landlord, being a married man, was not himself eligible, much to his regret, for the lady was young and pretty, so after a moment's thought he seized his hat and coat and hurried out.

There were summer cottages in B., one of which was owned by a widow named Thurber. Her son Harry, a man of twenty-five, had come from the city to prepare the place for the reception of a house party that was to follow him into the country. Harry



"I AM FREE!" SHE EXCLAIMED.

Thurber was superintending the unpacking of some boxes of supplies when the landlord of the Antlers came rushing in, exclaiming:

"I want a man."

"What for?" asked Thurber, looking up inquisitively.

"To marry a young woman who is in a big hurry."

"You don't mean it?"

"She says she'll make it worth any man's while to marry her."

"Is she a flirt?"

"No; she has a lot of style about her and is pretty."

"By Jove, I have a mind to go and take a look at her."

There was more talk over the matter while the lady was impatiently stamping back and forth across the floor of the inn. The landlord was not unwilling that Thurber should help him out of the matter, so the two set off together to join her. The lady looked surprised at seeing a man of Thurber's station, but as there was evidently no time to lose she said quickly:

"I expected some ordinary man to give me the legal status of a married woman for a consideration."

"I might fill the bill without the consideration."

"But you must sign a paper agreeing not to claim any matrimonial rights to leave me as soon as married."

Thurber stood looking at the girl for a few moments, during which a great deal was passing through his mind. Presently he said:

"I'm your man."

"Have you a clergyman handy?" asked the lady of the landlord.

"No, but we have a justice of the peace."

"Call him."

The landlord looked at Thurber, who gave his assent, and the justice was called.

"I see," said Thurber to the girl, "that for some reason you think it essential to assume the legal status of wife. I will accommodate you with-

out any reward except that you shall join a party to be given at my mother's cottage, the guests to arrive this afternoon."

The girl thought a moment, then said:

"I agree to the terms."

At this moment the justice appeared. The two stood up before him and were married, the landlord and his wife being witnesses. The ceremony had scarcely been performed and the two pronounced man and wife before a second sleigh was driven up to the house in hot haste. An elderly gentleman got out and, coming in, confronted the party. The bride snatched the certificate from the justice's hand and held it triumphantly before the newcomer.

"I am free!" she exclaimed. Then, turning to her husband, she added, "I call upon you to protect me from this man."

"I am the lady's husband," said Thurber, "and as such her legal protector."

The gentleman stood scowling at the two for a moment, then, turning, left the room, going to Thurber.

"You have wed one who has been declared insane, and I question if such a marriage is legal. However, you have gained an advantage and I must leave your bride in your possession. But I shall take steps to have the marriage annulled on the ground that the bride is not in her right mind."

As soon as he had gone the lady made an explanation. She was an orphan in possession of a large fortune. The man who had followed her was her stepfather and guardian. He had been her mother's second husband, and from her mother she had received her inheritance. Her stepfather had managed the property from the time the heiress was a little girl and had made away with a part of it. To avoid making an accounting and continuing to control he had succeeded in having her adjudged incompetent to attend to her affairs and afterward insane. She had escaped from a private sanitarium and, having been advised that as a married woman she would have a different status from what she occupied under a guardian, she determined to secure a husband before her stepfather could again get his clutches upon her.

When Mrs. Thurber senior arrived that afternoon at her cottage her son informed her that there was a young lady at the village inn whom he had invited to join their circle. Those cognizant of the wedding had been pledged to keep the secret, and Harry did not mention to his mother or his guests that he was a married man. When his wife arrived she was introduced under the name of Miss Eugenia Reeves.

Everything went smoothly for the pair, who were to their associates simply drifting into a love affair but were really man and wife. A week after the lady had come into the Thurber cottage Harry one morning informed her that his mother intended going back to the city the next day and the party must be broken up. He had been very happy there and had urged his mother to remain longer, but without success. "And now," he concluded,

"you are free to go forth unencumbered by a husband except under the law. But if you will remain with me as my wife I shall consider myself the most fortunate of men."

This "proposal" of a man to his wife the wife took under consideration, promising to give her husband an answer the same evening. But something occurred that afternoon to reveal the secret to the household. A man came to the cottage, forced his way into the house and, seeing Thurber and the supposed Miss Reeves in company with a number of guests, proceeded to read a legal paper addressed to Henry Townsend Thurber and his wife, Eleanor, Bradford Thurber, enjoining them to appear before the court and show cause, etc.

The lady in the case received the exposure with her eyes bent upon the floor, while the man looked for a moment as if he had been caught stealing. But the first shock over he approached his wife, took her hand and said:

"My friends, I owe you an explanation for introducing a lady to you as a spinster, she being really my wife."

He then told the story as it has been told up to this point, at the end of which every one pressed forward to congratulate the bride and groom. All agreed that, while the marriage by the justice was binding in law, it should be repeated under different surroundings.

These matters served to bring about a decision on the part of the bride to accept her legal husband as her real husband, and she blushingly consented. A minister was telephoned for to come from the next station, and during the evening a second wedding took place among a gleeful circle.

The Bradford-Thurber case from the moment of Eleanor Bradford's marriage to Henry Thurber assumed a very different status. Since they lived together as man and wife all effort on the part of the guardian to annul the marriage proved a failure. Harry Thurber, who had for several years been in charge of his mother's property, as well as educated to the law, proved an admirable manager of his wife's case. He fought any further efforts to prove his wife insane successfully and placed her guardian in a position where, if prosecuted, he would be liable to state prison. But here his wife relented and refused to prosecute the man who had been her mother's husband. There was more than enough of the estate left to enable her and her husband to live in style, and Thurber in time came into an estate of his own.

The sudden wedding which turned out so fortunately, attracted a great deal of attention among the friends of both parties.

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